

## Chapter I

# Body, Production, Productivity

Spinoza said: we don't know what a body can do. The question of a body's *power* [*pouvoir*] pushes aside another question that we tend to ask right away: the question about what it is, its nature, its identity. We need to know what it can do, before we can worry about what it is. There's still more to this, because the two questions belong to different registers or orders of questioning. The question about power refers to an experience of perception about intensity, an experience of knowledge [*connaissance*] that is direct and without words. Conversely, the question about identity presupposes nomination, and it also presupposes that the body has already been *subjected to the trial of self-identification*. What response to the question "Who are you?" can we expect from someone who has never asked themselves this question? With language, we enter a labyrinth, for we only identify that which has already identified itself with something other than itself. And what does the body identify itself with? The question becomes an enquiry. There's no way out, but we can't avoid it either. Nevertheless, we can refer the question back to itself by asking another: who is it that wants to ask "Who is there?"; who is it that demands that this unknown presence declare its identity?

The answer comes to us immediately: guards and the police. The guards in apartment buildings, warehouses, barracks, in all public or private property. The question of identity is suspicious, because it doesn't know and fears not knowing, because it guesses and fears guessing. The one who asks *who* obviously lacks peace of mind; he has something to lose, and something to hide as well, and something to fear, *a priori*, from whoever may appear. Identity is, in effect, a relation to anonymity. Only the

unknown, the undifferentiated, the anonymous have need of a name and number. That anyone at all, whoever it may be, may be unknown and therefore threatening is the reality, the universe, of the one who guards property.

On the other hand, the policial conception of history belongs to those who dominate it. It is the reigning perspective and in this manner the productive body had to deal with the question of identity. It needed a name. Like every unknown, it threatens property, as if it were an empowered form of property. And the name that it bears refers back to the policial universe in a certain manner that needs to be analyzed.

This body is named productive. How does that constitute an identity? Aren't all bodies that way? If we consider the body most generally understood as such, the animal body, we see that it produces, at the least, its own substance, according to the concept of its species. It produces its descendants according to the same concept and we can call it the producer of its species. But we never do that. All the acts of animal bodies are referred to their nature as living beings, not as producers.

Similarly, children have the capacity to transform materials given to them as they play, but in so doing they're only having fun and certainly not producing.

Being productive is therefore not the property of whoever transforms, or informs, a previously furnished material, as the myth of *creativity*, another suspect term, would have it. In truth, being productive is not the property of anyone or anything, whereas products, on the other hand, are indeed the *property* of whoever appropriates them. This means that the term belongs to the vocabulary of a certain type of proprietor, or owner.

In effect, if being productive is being capable of giving way to products, objects of an appropriation, this is because the final form of production, the product, is valued in itself or in a privileged manner. But who wants products, if not a consumer? Who would appropriate for themselves products that are not in any

way consumable? Production and productivity are names given by those who consume; they are signs in the discourse of the consumer.

We call it the *productive* body, not the *producer*. The concept and name refer not to production, but to productivity. In German this is called *Productivkraft*; not productive force, but the capacity or faculty of producing. In the same way, the *Urteilkraft* that is the object of Kant's critique is not the power, but the capacity or faculty of judgment. The faculty! Is it therefore facultative, or optional? Is producing therefore facultative, optional, or in some manner contingent? Is it the exercise of a power [*puissance*] that one could just as easily abstain from exercising? Those who work the earth don't feel that their power of cultivation, their productivity, is exercised in an optional or facultative manner. They attribute to the earth itself the attitude of a capricious landowner capable of spontaneous generosity. Magical practices presuppose a faculty or capacity of producing, and therefore of not producing; they presuppose the suspension of this power. But the power is derived from nature or, if one prefers, there is no isolatable and identifiable productive body as long as the social body profits primarily from agricultural work.

This is because the one who works the earth conceives of herself or himself as the consumer of the earth's products rather than as their producer. This is the only sense in which the term productivity, attributed to the earth, can enter into their discourse.

What this means is that, in order for the productive body to be composed of laborers, and not of a vague unity between the earth and those who exploit it, consumption must be socially and not naturally cut off from production. There must be a space that allows the consumer to see production as an alien power [*puissance étrangère*] which functions in the consumer's service and which suspends its power or service. But it's not enough to speak of a space or a distance if we cannot say who it is that separates, that pushes away and occupies the space delimited in

this manner. We can assume that the mediator will act in his own self-interest, and will ensure that he maintains considerable power [*puissance*] over the parties placed in relation to one another in this manner.

This mediator is the proprietor of the products. The productive body exists for the consumer; it exists from the consumer's point of view under this name. It therefore exists for and by the consumer's products. To be the proprietor of products is to dominate production.

Whoever appropriates products appropriates their sale, or the *market*.

We see then that the productive body exists only in a market economy or a mercantile mode of production. The secret of the empowering or suspension of production, under the name of productivity, is that production is destined not for direct consumption, a second moment in the cycle, but for the market, for the temporary appropriation of products, for exchange.

Conversely, the appearance of the market, of the regime of exchange, of mercantilism, leads to the crystallization of the productive body, renders it visible, gives it a face and an identity.

This separation and division in the productive body, constitutive of this body, is therefore allied with another external, higher division, a social division: that between the city and the country. In truth, the division between production and consumption, the intervention of exchange and distribution, do not affect the productive body itself in an internal way; they only individualize it. Nevertheless, this first great division affecting the exterior of the productive body is the after-effect of a division within the social body. It sets us on a path: any division affecting the interior of the productive body will always necessarily refer us back to the great social division that provoked it.

The division between production and the product, which is exchangeable and consumable, makes a place for a mediator or intermediary. If it's true that the mediator appropriates

production along with the product, then we know who it is that the productive body obeys. This is a precious bit of information, for the nature of the servant will depend on that of the proprietor, or master.

The mediator is the middle [*moyen*] term, and it's also the term that designates a means [*moyen*]: the means by which the productive force or agency produces.<sup>2</sup> The mediator occupies the place of the means of production. If production is cut off from its power [*pouvoir*], because separated from its product, then why would it not also be cut off from its means of production? Once the productive body is individualized, identified with a pure power [*puissance*] to produce, a production that is empowered or suspended, then this immobile power [*puissance*] must be given an agent, a trigger, a means of passing into action. It requires the mediation of a merchant who buys in order to sell, who opens the market, who gives the body an appropriate milieu. What would a body be without metabolism, without exchanges, without consumption and voiding?

Thus the merchant knew how to make the productive body into something *dependent*, something that must beg in order to live. But the pimp, the usurer, the extortionist, the scalper are not masters. The dependent force is not subjugated so easily; it doesn't work in the service of whoever holds it on a leash. For this, something more is necessary: what this requires is the passage of the mediator or the middle [*moyen*] term into the very interior of the body to be subjugated, where it can take possession of the decisive locus of its power. The merchant mode of production has not yet taken over production itself; mercantile relations are not yet one with productive forces.

To put it another way, the mediator must appropriate not the means of production—every mode of production does this even as it leaves the productive body intact, each depending on the other—but the means of *productivity* or the inner springs of production.

The movement by which mercantilism takes over the productive body, as a blank force occupying the empty space separating production from the product, may give the impression of inflating the productive body until it occupies the entire economic sphere, until it is made to swallow the very market that is its crucial milieu. The limit of this conquest is the meeting of the two concepts of the productive body and the economy. Since Lenin, we know that the maximum *spatial* extension of the productive body may be that of the planet itself, since imperialism has effectively covered its entire surface. But we must bear in mind that this inflation is the phenomenal appearance of an internal theft and appropriation of the body's productivity by its means, by the blank and parasitic force that has cut it off from its power [*pouvoir*].

We see that the productive body has a historical becoming (actually, it has already *become*, it has developed and ripened, as one says of a cheese. It has become entirely mercantilized, and the blank force of the mediator has spread its contagion over almost all of its cogs). The relevant question about what it can do now depends in real terms on the political question of what it is, its identity, on the series of its identifications, a series that develops along with the progressive stages of its internal appropriation.

How can we follow this "progress," this progression of mercantile forces' parasitic relation to productive forces?